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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes an ethnohistorical study of the way in which a medium-sized suburban school district's implementation of site-based, shared decision making interacted with attitudes and procedures created by earlier district reforms. A second focus is on how the adoption of a new curriculum framework, based on a whole-language philosophy and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards, was influenced by expectations left by the mandated use of criterion-referenced tests under the previous superintendent. Data sources included historical documents, interviews, and participant and nonparticipant observation. A total of 118 people participated in interviews or surveys: 2 school board members; 13 district administrators and specialists; the principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor from each of the district's three high schools; 9 building administrators at the K-9 level; 71 teachers; 7 support personnel; and 7 community members. The effectiveness of site-based, shared decision making was limited by two factors: (1) personnel unwillingness to implement policies; and (2) political and social considerations, such as the state budget shortfall. The new integrated curriculum framework was successfully implemented in the elementary schools and in one high school, but not in the junior high schools or the other two high schools. Shared decision making proved to be useful for addressing problems within the district's administrative control. However, the process did not alter the district's continued vulnerability to important regularities embedded within its social context. For example, decisions about school-based programs aimed at equalizing the educational opportunities of students continued to generate controversy. These findings suggest that the shared decision-making process can offer no more than a partial solution to problems facing school districts today. (LMI)

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A GEOLOGY OF SCHOOL REFORM: PAST REFORMS INTERACT WITH NEW AS A SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPLEMENTS SHARED DECISION MAKING

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This article summarizes an ethnohistorical study of the way in which a medium-sized suburban school district's implementation of site-based shared decision making interacted with attitudes and procedures created by earlier reforms carried out in the district. A second focus is how adoption of a new Curriculum Framework, based on a whole language philosophy and emphasis on the NCTM *Standards* in math, was influenced by expectations left by the mandated use of criterion referenced tests under the previous superintendent.

The research literature has repeatedly pointed to discrepancies between formally adopted policies and the observable practices which actually become embedded in the regularities of the school culture. Sarason (1971) insists that possession of a mandate for change is often far from enough to insure achievement of the intended purpose. Fullan and Miles note: "Schools are overloaded with problems--and, ironically, with solutions that don't work" (1992, p.745). Cubar (1990) describes the need for deeper, second-order changes in the structures and cultures of schools, rather than superficial first-order changes. Sarason (1991) recalls what happened in the 1960s and 1970s when educational policy makers legislated wholesale introduction of the new math, the new biology, the new physics, the new social studies, while remaining "scandalously insensitive to what was involved in changing classroom regularities" (p. 90).

On the other hand, advocates of taking a site-based, community-oriented approach to school management hold forth the possibility of establishing true community standards, mutually acknowledged by parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders, as the basis for interactions within schools. In practical terms this does not just mean moving many decisions about school improvement out of the central office and into the schools. It also implies changes in the roles of parents, students and school personnel in the district.

> Schools would be markedly different if their ongoing function was to ensure successful performance. . . We would not put up long with a physician who sent our child home with an F for health but no assistance in becoming healthy. (Goodlad, 1984)

Here lies the rub. Most people agree, at least in a general way, about what constitutes good health. Agreement on what constitutes a "good" education is harder to come by. For a site-based approach to school improvement to be successful, there must be a reorientation not only in the way schools are operated but also in the way many members of the school community have habitually thought about schooling (Caldwell and Wood, 1990).

This paper summarizes an ethnohistorical study of how a medium-sized suburban school district's implementation of site-based shared decision making and a new Curriculum Framework interacted with expectations created as a result of earlier reforms carried out in the district. Data

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were gathered from a variety of sources: historical documents, interviews, participant and non-participant observation. Interviews were carried out with, and/or survey information collected from, a stratified sample of individuals which included: two school board members; seven members of the school district's central administrative team; the principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor from each of the district's three comprehensive high schools; four district curriculum specialists; two district staff development specialists; nine building administrators at the K-9 level; seventy-one classroom teachers; seven paraprofessional/ support personnel; and seven community members.

The Cottonwood School District

During its 40 year history, the "Cottonwood School District" has had 3 superintendents, each of whom had a tenure of 10 years or more. Each has left an imprint on the culture of the district. Ed Larimer, a former gold miner who headed the district from the early 1950s to the early 1970s emphasized using innovative teaching methods to teach the traditional academic subjects. Farm boys were routinely expected to read Sophocles. Student writing skills were strongly emphasized. However, quality was uneven across the district. The population of this once-rural area was changing radically. Suburban development extended ever further from the nearby regional metropolis. Money often had to be borrowed to get through the spring.

Bill Davis, who headed the district from 1972 to 1982, introduced a strict management by objectives model of school governance, based on work by theorists in the field of business administration. Under this highly centralized system, specific goals were set for each administrator and strict accountability insisted upon. During the tenure of Superintendent Davis, the curriculum emphasis shifted from mastery of traditional academic subject matter to mastery of identifiable skills. Teachers were required to teach to specific objectives and criterion-referenced tests were extensively used on the classroom level to make sure these objectives were met. This test-driven curriculum eventually met with strong resistance from teachers who felt that all the emphasis on testing kept them from teaching students how to integrate the isolated skills. Upwardly mobile suburban parents objected to the lack of cultural enrichment in the curriculum and began to pressure for more emphasis on literature and the arts.

When Dr. Davis retired in 1982, the Cottonwood school board hired Dr. Dave Roberts, who advocated a shared decision making approach, as the new superintendent. They hoped that his more conciliatory management style would enable him to eliminate tensions which were dividing parents, teachers and administrators. Dr. Roberts installed a system of school governance based on the site-based, shared decision making model researched by John Goodlad. District-wide teacher surveys were carried out at both the elementary and the secondary levels. The dissatisfaction of teachers and parents with the time and energy being put into criterion-referenced testing led to an intensive effort to evolve a new Curriculum Framework.

The Problem of Change

Serving an increasingly diverse population spread over an area of approximately 60 square miles, the suburban Cottonwood School District faced many of the challenges encountered by similar districts across the United States. Cottonwood's 35 schools vary widely in student demographic characteristics, from ethnically diverse schools located near a large regional metropolis to schools located in relatively homogeneous outer suburbs. Western State, where the Cottonwood School District is located, has in the last few years faced a severe budget crisis. Thus Cottonwood's recent restructuring efforts have taken place in an environment of financial retrenchment.

When he arrived in 1982, Dr. Roberts was confronted with a daunting problem: How could a new superintendent effectively bring about change in a school district with over 2000 employees, many of them ignorant of the skills and procedures necessary to achieve success

under the new superintendent's proposed models of school governance? Goodlad (1984) has pointed out:

> In our earlier study of educational change and school improvement, we found that most of the school principals of the participating schools lacked major skills and abilities required for effecting educational improvement. They did not know how to select problems likely to provide leverage for schoolwide improvement, how to build a long-term agenda, how to assure some continuity of business from faculty meeting to faculty meeting, how to secure and recognize a working consensus, and on and on. Some were hopelessly mired in paperwork, exaggerating the magnitude of the tasks involved in part to avoid areas of work where they felt less secure (p. 306).

In Cottonwood the problem of organizational change was initially approached by contracting /I/D/E/A/ of Dayton, Ohio, to provide training to teams of administrators, teachers, and parents. Superintendent Roberts explained:

> In 1984 the district [illegible]ught in /I/D/E/A/ to provide training for a selected number of schools that were interested in learning about "decentralization" as a vehicle for reforming education. /I/D/E/A/ called this training "a school improvement process" which quickly became the accepted term for shared decision-making in Cottonwood. /I/D/E/A/ did a magnificent job in providing teams of teachers, administrators, parents, and sometimes students, from 17 schools the opportunity to explore the meaning of school improvement using a collaborative approach.

Approximately half the Cottonwood schools chose to take this training. As the experiment with shared decision making progressed, the culture of schools actively involved in the school improvement process became more and more differentiated from those where old-line administrators had changed little more than the vocabulary they used when discussing the decision making process.

What Does It Mean to Share Control?

The tension between the shared decision making philosophy favored by Dr. Roberts and the Management by Objectives approach, which still strongly influenced the outlook of many Cottonwood personnel, centered on the concept of risk. Management by Objectives was aimed at eliminating risk by specifying in great detail what was expected of each member of the district staff. On the other hand, shared decision making requires taking the risk of trusting teachers to take on far more responsibility than they had been allowed to have under the Davis superintendency. Such an abrupt about-face in district policy produced varied reactions Every teacher I spoke with, even those teachers who preferred to have the principal handle day-to-day administrative decisions, liked having a voice in deciding important policy issues. However principals who had their roots in the Davis era often reported feeling they had the responsibility, but not the power, to keep staff members moving toward declared district goals.

Those principals who identified with the Roberts era tended to see their jobs differently. They were enthusiastic about the kind of buy-in they got when staff members participated in important policy changes. These principals insisted that having a policy which all staff members had agreed to support, although it might not be quite the decision that they would have preferred, was still far better than having to deal with the passive resistance of disgruntled teachers. In part, such differences in viewpoint among administrative personnel could be explained by the expectations communicated to principals by the Roberts administration. However, other factors

also played a part. Those principals who were most successful using the shared decision making model tended to be comfortable with the give-and-take communication style required. They had a different personality profile than was typical of administrators from the more authoritarian Davis era.

The problems Superintendent Roberts encountered, as he attempted to cultivate a school culture in which all individuals would be able to participate in finding solutions to shared problems, have been multiple:

1. Time--teachers were often so busy with their classroom tasks that, when asked to participate in finding solutions to problems once routinely left to administrators, they often saw this invitation more as a burden than as an opportunity.

2. Resistance to collaborative approach--throughout their careers most teachers had been accustomed to both the isolation and the freedom of the closed door. Administrators had been accustomed to having a relatively free hand within their assigned realm of authority.

3. Resistance to risk-taking--under the previous superintendent the doctrine of accountability was based on the premise that control could be exercised over every employee and every step in the learning process. Now the new superintendent was encouraging staff to take risks in order to change a system that many perceived to be satisfactory as it stood.

4. Dialogue--the shared decision-making model demanded that personnel not only "go through the motions" but also entertain, discuss and act upon ideas which might be at variance with those they already held. Without the introduction of new insights, the shared decision-making process too easily end up "re-inventing" solutions that were all but indistinguishable from the existing situation.

As it happened, some authoritarian principals, who had long operated as benevolent dictators, were actually quite popular with their staff members and parents. The unrest among parents, which became noticeable in the wealthier out-lying suburbs during the last years of Dr. Davis' tenure, never spread to lower SES areas of the district, where the lack of instruction in art and literature in the old test-driven curriculum was never a cause for widespread public complaint. Indeed, some teachers in low SES schools questioned whether the whole language approach embodied in the new Curriculum Framework did not in some ways handicap children who arrived at school without the knowledge of standard English usage possessed by middle class students.

Faced with such differences among teachers, principals and parents, Dr. Roberts chose to allow considerable leeway to individual schools. In a thirty-five school district which included wide variations in local history, ethnicity and SES, this may have been in inevitable decision. But it resulted in considerable political maneuvering at the building level.

Bringing about Curriculum Change

The teacher surveys carried out soon after Dr. Roberts' arrival in the district had showed strong dissatisfaction with the existing curriculum. Materials published by the district explain:

> Both the Elementary Curriculum Review conducted in 1985 and the High School Study (1984-85) indicated strong teacher dissatisfaction with the objective-based curriculum. The objective based curriculum presented learning as a set of segmented skills, emphasized knowledge of facts rather than application of

content, and focused on content to the exclusion of process. At the elementary and junior high level, the "minimum" curriculum became the only curriculum. High school teachers never accepted the objectives and taught their own curriculum.

District curriculum specialists working to develop a new curriculum more in line with the stated preferences of teachers and parents drew on "whole language" research, as well as materials published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and Project 2061 in science. In stark contrast to the criterion-referenced tests then in place, the new curriculum was to emphasize performance-based assessment and integration of academic content areas. Aware that such sweeping change would require carefully thought out implementation strategies, administrators and curriculum specialists began searching the research literature for information on how such far-reaching curriculum change might be effectively brought about. The change process they put in place was a major focus of this study.

Implementation of the Curriculum Framework

Although the change in philosophy was greeted with enthusiasm by those staff members who had become disillusioned with the test-driven approach, some building principals were less enthusiastic. As one principal explained, "We were just starting to get to a place which smelled really good to many of us, where we really felt we had our fingers on the pulse of the school." Under the old curriculum, acceptable levels of student achievement had been defined in an easily understood, straight-forward manner: 80% of a class was to achieve a score of at least 80% on a given criterion-referenced test. The new Curriculum Framework made evaluation of teacher performance much more subjective. Feeling unsure in their new role, a number of principals opted for a "go slow" approach.

In developing and implementing the new Curriculum Framework the Cottonwood district had to answer a number of challenging questions: 1.) Just how prescriptive should the curriculum be in a site-based district? 2.) How much variation ought to be allowed among schools? 3.) If a consensus is reached at the district level that curriculum change is desirable, how should that change be brought about? 4.) When a particular curriculum change is tied to a new research-based understanding of the learning process, how are teachers whose current way of teaching is grounded in an earlier model of cognition to be brought onboard? 5.) How can implementation be effectively carried out during a period of cost cutting and budgetary restraint?

The first two questions were quickly answered. In keeping with the philosophy of site-based decision making, teachers were encouraged to use a variety of techniques and resources to meet student needs, with due allowance made for the fact that students have a variety of learning styles and teachers have different instructional strengths. The thorny question of how much latitude individual teachers and schools would have in curricular approach was addressed in the following carefully worded paragraph:

> The C & I (Curriculum and Instruction) Services Department provides information, inservices, and resources based upon educational research. Research conducted in the 1980s indicates that student achievement is higher when: content is taught in a meaningful context rather than isolation; pupils are given the opportunity to apply what they have learned; and content areas are integrated. Since whole language, math problem solving and the integration of social studies, science and health are consistent with the research, we encourage their use. However, it is the prerogative of each teacher, under the supervision of the building principal, to identify the most appropriate instructional techniques for a given group of students.

The district's Curriculum and Instruction Services Department (hereafter referred to as C & I) took responsibility for researching new approaches to teaching and developing the new Curriculum Framework. Those schools most eager to explore new options became the pilot schools for the evolving integrated curriculum. This study focused primarily on the elementary level as implementation at the secondary level (with the exception of Sagebrush High, which will be addressed in the following section) had just begun. Language arts was first to be addressed since this was where resistance to the old test-driven curriculum had been sharpest. Experienced teachers who were enthusiastic about the integrated approach were recruited to act as "coaches" at each pilot school. After attending classes taught by district curriculum specialists, these coaches in turn modeled techniques and taught similar classes to the faculty at their own schools. A sixth grade teacher who served as language arts coach for her school described her experiences:

> I had a student teacher in the Fall, so during the time that she was able to take over my classroom, I served as a resource person and went to all of the grade levels and asked who would be interested in having me come in, and how I could best help them. Then, I set up meetings with them during their planning times and we looked at the Curriculum Framework, and I said, "Where are you having the most difficulty, or what would you like to see? What isn't going well?" and picked out a specific area and planned. I would plan a lesson based on that particular outcome, and go in and present the lesson, and then usually I did a follow-up lesson. I did at least two lessons with them, and then I debriefed with them again during the planning time to give them ideas on how they could follow up, or other things they could use, or how it went when I wasn't in the room, you know. I really think that was really effective.
>
> Last year we hired substitutes and I had a lot of teachers come observe me doing lessons in my classroom, and I had all different grade levels come and observe, and also then a sub covered my class immediately after that, so I could go and debrief with them. And that was also very effective, because they were all brainstorming how they could change it, and use it for their grade level, or how different it was to see different level kids. That was also pretty effective.

The help and advice provided by teacher-coaches at each pilot school were the primary means by which new research-based understandings of the learning process were introduced to teachers whose current way of teaching was grounded in an earlier model of cognition. Originally, the plan had been to provide extensive support to teacher-coaches through the district C & I Department. However significant budget shortfalls at the state level had unexpectedly reduced the funding available for such support. In order to keep budget cuts as far from the classroom as possible, the Cottonwood District was forced to make large cuts in the C & I staff. This meant that more reliance was put on building teacher-coaches than had originally been intended. Comments about stresses caused by the cuts to C & I cropped up often in the course of the present study. Building coaches missed the regular visits of district curriculum specialists.

In most pilot schools an accommodation had been reached whereby the literacy resource teacher also acted as language arts curriculum coach. A reading teacher described her duties under the old system:

> They wanted pull out and there wasn't administrative support for anything different. "Pull out the low kids." That is what they wanted. So, the teachers were doing criterion referenced tests, but I wasn't involved in it at all.

Now the duties of the literacy resource position have effectively been changed from operating a remedial pull-out program to working collaboratively with regular classroom teachers. The new Curriculum Framework not only emphasized integration of subject matter, but also the integrated teaching of all students within the classroom setting whenever possible. With that change in instructional philosophy came a different attitude toward the function of reading resource and Chapter 1 teachers, both of whom now emphasize in-class support. A reading teacher explained her new role:

> Sometimes I would teach all three (reading) groups, and the teacher would observe . . . because they didn't have training, you know, and I would try to sell [people taking] the district classes that were being offered about adapting a basal reader. They could still use the basals as long as they would not depend on the teachers' guide to tell them what to do with it, because the basals weren't structured so that [the students] could utilize skills once they taught them. So, they would have to look at the story and see what skill they could pull from it, and then teach that, and then give them a chance to practice by reading a story where they would need that skill. I mean that's still fine.

The coaching function assigned to the literacy resource teachers filled part of the gap left by cuts in the district C & I department, but there are not enough literacy resource teachers to fill all language arts coaching positions. Since many piloting schools felt a need to have both a primary- and an intermediate-level language arts curriculum coach, the second coach was often a regular classroom teacher. All math coaches (with one exception, a school which opted to do without a literacy resource teacher for one year in order to release a teacher to work as a full-time math coach) were regular classroom teachers. Many such teacher/coaches reported feeling torn between helping colleagues and focusing on the needs of the students in their own classrooms.

The deadline which had been set by the school board for full implementation of the Curriculum Framework in all schools was 1995. However, there was great variation in the pace of implementation. At the time when the present study was conducted, some pilot schools had been working on the Language Arts Curriculum Framework for as long as five years. On the other hand, one school had continued reporting out to parents on the basis of objectives tied to the old test-driven curriculum until the year before. Although such adherence to skill-based objectives whose use had not been required for almost a decade was highly unusual, approximately half of the district's 35 schools were just in the beginning stages of implementing the new Curriculum Framework. A curriculum specialist speculated: "Perhaps they [the older principals] hoped that in the meantime curriculum fashions would change and relieve them of the task of reexamining their established habits."

The New High School

In the late 1980s the new Sagebrush High School was built to serve outlying suburban areas of the Cottonwood district. Sharp socioeconomic differences separated these outer suburbs from low SES neighborhoods nearer Foothills City. Also, the Sagebrush High curriculum had been strongly influenced by the Nine Principles put forth by Dr. Ted Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Those Cottonwood junior high and high school teachers who had applied for positions, and been accepted to teach, at Sagebrush High had also tended to be those who were most enthusiastic about the integrated teaching methods embodied in the new Curriculum Framework. An unintended result of gathering the most experientially-oriented secondary teachers in a single school was that other secondary schools were left with few teachers who supported a rapid changeover to the new Curriculum Framework.

During the planning process, it had been expected that Sagebrush High's innovative curriculum would serve as an example to the other schools. However, friction arising out of perceptions that Sagebrush "had it all" tended to isolate the staff at Sagebrush from their colleagues elsewhere in the district. Political pressures exerted by parents exacerbated this situation. Originally, the plan had been that Sagebrush would start with a student body half the size of the other two high schools and would fill up slowly as housing developments were built ever further from Foothills City. However the public perception was that an expensive new facility at Sagebrush High was being allowed to stand half empty.

Under fierce public attack by parents, who argued that they had voted for the bond measure to finance building that school assuming that their children would be able to attend it, the school board decided to allow Sagebrush to fill up more quickly than had been planned. Although the school district would not bus students to a school outside their official attendance area, a policy of limited open enrollment was officially adopted. Soon after, a law was passed by the state legislature, mandating school choice within districts: the new law stipulated that students could transfer to any school within their district which had room for them. Parents anywhere in the district could now apply to send their child to the "half empty" Sagebrush High School. Metroville High, the high school closest to Foothills City, experienced a dramatic drop in student numbers.

Many of the students who transferred to Sagebrush were perceived by faculty members at the other two high schools to be relatively more affluent and highly motivated than many students who remained at the older high schools. The attitude encountered repeatedly among staff members at the other two high schools could be paraphrased: "Sagebrush got to choose the best teachers, ended up with the best students, and was given an up-to-date, high tech building to house them in. If you ask me, it would be strange if they *hadn't* come out of it looking pretty good!" Although understandable jealousies and resentments have undoubtedly influenced this attitude, the challenge is a valid one. Intervening factors such as student characteristics made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of Sagebrush High's innovative integrated curriculum. To what extent did positive comments made by Sagebrush teachers and students affirm the validity of the "Sagebrush philosophy," and to what extent were they, as a staff member at another school suggested, the comments of people "who got a sweet deal and know it," quite aside from questions of curriculum or philosophy?

In the realm of shared decision making, Sagebrush also had an advantage in that its staff had "bought into" a single, coherent vision. When disagreements arose, the school's vision statement could be, and was, held up as the unifying standard against which new ideas were measured. Although the older high schools and junior highs had also adopted vision statements, they tended to express only broad, generally acceptable goals. In practice, this lack of a specific vision has meant that, in order to bring about consensus on any given issue, common ground has to be found among staff members with widely varying, even opposing views. With so many individuals pulling in opposing directions, the energies of people who desired differing kinds of change often canceled one another out. In the end these schools have most often decided to stay with the *status quo*, which at least has the advantage of familiarity.

Use of shared decision making at the high school level did lead to restructuring of a different kind at Metroville High, however. This school, which draws its student population from a low SES area with a high minority population, instituted a rigorous International Baccalaureate program aimed at bringing middle class students back to a school which had experienced a demoralizing exodus of such students. The IB program has, however, raised some questions among Cottonwood staff members who see it as dividing the Metro student body into a select group of IB students, drawn from across the district, and the remainder of the student body, with whom the IB students have little contact.

Dilemmas Inherent in the Change Process

From a district-wide perspective, site-based decision making has made possible the introduction of a wide variety of programs at individual schools. For example, there are before-school, after-school and summer programs based at elementary schools in low SES neighborhoods where the need for after-hours supervision of students had become acute. Sagebrush High has entertained hundreds of visitors from other school districts who were interested to see what an integrated curriculum at the high school level would look like. District task forces have been able to deal effectively with challenges like the budget cutting forced upon the district by a large budgetary shortfall at the state level. Even at those schools where outsiders might observe little change, teachers reported feelings of empowerment as a result of being consulted on policy matters.

Implementation of the new Curriculum Framework is still in process. Through a system of teacher-coaches at the building level, teachers have been assisted in reevaluating their instructional practices and introducing more integrated, experiential teaching methods. Although its implementation has so far been limited to the elementary schools my research indicates that full implementation of the language arts curriculum framework has been achieved in the 9 original pilot schools, and significant progress toward implementation has been made in the remaining elementary schools. Implementation of the math curriculum framework, which was began in the fall of 1991, lags behind language arts and remains dependent upon intensive effort by district curriculum specialists as implementation proceeds.

On the junior high level, however, school staff members have used the same site-based management apparatus which has helped to bring about curriculum change at the elementary level in order to block change. The whole language philosophy has not taken hold among junior high teachers. Many junior high teachers got a bad impression of whole language during the first few years of implementation when many elementary teachers did not yet know how to effectively integrate teaching of phonics, spelling and grammar into the literature-based curriculum. At present, although full implementation of the curriculum framework has been mandated district-wide, at all grade levels, by the fall of 1995, very little movement in that direction can be seen at the junior high level.

Although Sagebrush High has been successful in its restructuring efforts, this has been done at the cost of leaving other schools in the district bereft of those staff members who might have worked for change in those schools. There is little doubt that the superintendent would like to see all secondary schools adopt the sort of integrated approach to teaching and extensive use of shared decision making seen at Sagebrush High. However, given the freedom to choose, most secondary teachers have, thus far, chosen to continue using the teaching methods to which they had become accustomed.

The dilemma faced by the Cottonwood superintendent is that, by giving away power through site-based management, he has made governance structures within the Cottonwood district more democratic, but he has also given up much of his control over the changes which personnel at the school sites may choose to implement. Dr. Roberts chose to make his stand on the issue of student learning, emphasizing the importance of helping students to make connections and to use the knowledge they acquired, rather than specifying that all schools use the Curriculum Framework in the same way. All schools in the district were required have some form of the Curriculum Framework in place by the fall of 1995, but schools which preferred to continue incorporating a large amount of direct teaching into their classroom practice are welcome to so do.

If the district did not also face severe budget cuts because of a funding shortfall at the state level, a system of building level curriculum coaches such as has been used in the elementary schools might be employed to move the junior highs and high schools toward implementation of the integrated, performance-based curriculum framework. But, due to budget

cuts, there are not enough curriculum specialists available to train and support junior high curriculum coaches. Nor can the district afford to assign the curriculum specialists currently working on elementary level implementation to work at the junior high schools. All curriculum specialists currently working with elementary level building coaches will be needed at that level if the math implementation is to proceed as planned.

My overall finding is that the effectiveness of site-based, shared decision making in the Cottonwood School District has been limited by two factors:

1.) Unwillingness of personnel at many buildings to implement policies necessary to bring about far-reaching change;

2.) Political and social considerations, such as the state budget shortfall, originating in the social context within which the school district operates, which have either overruled or limited the effectiveness of the shared decision making process.

Elementary level classroom regularities across the Cottonwood School District have been changed through development and implementation of the new integrated curriculum framework. Sagebrush High is a radically restructured school. However, there is little change at the junior high level, and in 2 out of the 3 Cottonwood high schools. Even at Sagebrush High, teachers pointed out that the expectations entering Sagebrush students had built up, during 3 years spent in a traditional junior high, made it difficult for students to adapt to Sagebrush High's integrated core curriculum and lack of honors or remedial classes.

A Question of Values: Do We Emphasize Liberty? Equality? Fraternity?

Getting back to the geology metaphor, many of the unique characteristics of the culture of the Cottonwood School District grow out of the fact that three very different superintendents have each exerted a strong influence on its development. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Larimer administration was characterized by a strong emphasis on the use of innovative methods to teach the traditional academic subjects. During the 1970s and early 1980s, under Superintendent Davis, the emphasis shifted from mastery of specific academic subject matter to the mastery of identifiable skills. In the 1980s Superintendent Roberts introduced shared decision making and encouraged development of a new Curriculum Framework which utilized a whole language philosophy and the NCTM *Standards* in math.

One way to examine the values embedded in these differences is to draw parallels to the three ideals in the motto of the French Revolution: "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!" Superintendent Larimer, a former gold miner, allowed considerable curricular freedom to his teachers. Even the widespread use of tracking instituted under Larimer in the 1950s and 1960s grew out of a keen awareness of individual differences.

Administrators and school board members who wished to see the district take a more egalitarian (and administratively accountable) direction after Larimer retired faced the challenge of finding a convincing new answer to an old philosophical question: Scientifically speaking, there a great many ways in which human individuals are different or "unequal," and not many obvious ways in which they are "equal." So what alternative is there to recognizing and building upon the fact of inequality by offering to everyone that education they can best profit by?

Superintendent Bill Davis, a former professor of educational administration, contributed the required new insight by basing his approach to curriculum on Bloom's argument that all children can learn; they just vary on how long it takes them to learn. Under the mastery learning program Davis instituted, children could be regarded simply as the raw material fed into the educational system. It was the system which was held responsible for producing roughly equal learning outcomes through the use of scientific methods.

Instead of liberty, the keynote of the Davis approach was thus equality. However, the use of mastery learning, backed up by mandated criterion-referenced tests, was introduced just as a sharp economic downturn brought widespread changes to the heretofore homogeneous Cottonwood School District. As owners of apartment complexes near Foothills City became more willing to rent to a more diverse population, the school district found it difficult to show that mastery learning produced equal outcomes across an increasingly broad spectrum of SES.

When equal test outcomes were not forthcoming, the assumption that the educational system could somehow "process" all students so that they would be brought up to a certain minimum standard, was called into question. This brought up a further question: If the benefits to the low achieving student were not what had been promised, why should this system be continued? Many teachers considered the objectives-driven curriculum put in place by Dr. Davis to unnecessarily limit liberty, emphasizing conformity and eventually leading to mediocrity. The school district then faced a dilemma. If one takes seriously both these complaints and the opposing claim that a return to tracking and teacher "free enterprise" was not acceptable, then the question becomes: Is there a third choice, besides mediocrity or meritocracy? Can a system be devised which treats individuals equally, yet does not treat them merely as interchangeable units?

Dr. Roberts could be said to have answered this challenge by bringing into the discussion the third element of the famous motto: Fraternity. Despite its intuitive attractiveness, only recently have serious attempts been made to build "fraternity" into administrative systems through building a sense of community. The key to fostering feelings of community is building mutual confidence so that all stakeholders--parents, teachers, administrators, the pupils themselves--are deeply committed to creating the best possible learning environment.

Differences in roles are recognized. Voice, rather than formal equality, becomes the basis for the consensus-building process. Emphasis is put on allowing all members of the community the chance to be heard, while also making it clear that the aim of the deliberative process is to search out that course of action which is in the best interests of all. The goal is not to engage in a battle of words. In this way, subtle re-definition of "liberty" is introduced: liberty is not seen as "freedom from constraint" but is transformed into what might be called "shared freedom," a concept which carries with it a responsibility not to make use of one's liberties in such a manner as to injure others.

Conclusions

The legacy of each era the district has passed through remains visible in the policies of some Cottonwood schools and in the attitudes of some personnel. The priorities of the Davis era, with its emphasis on efficient use of resources, have continued to be influential within the district, surviving in almost pure form in the handling of business and accounting matters. The Larimer era's academic curriculum is still reflected in the academic emphasis at the two older high schools. Superintendent Roberts has chosen to concentrate his efforts on those programs that have a direct impact on what happens in the classroom, starting at the elementary level.

A substantial number of parents and secondary teachers continue to adhere to the humanist values that were strongly emphasized under Superintendent Larimer. Although vocational and social service offerings have been greatly expanded, the concept these individuals hold of "school" still centers on the teaching of the traditional academic subjects. By most accounts, the teaching of academic subjects within the college prep track at Suburban High and in many of the district's junior highs looks little different now than it did during Superintendent Larimer's tenure. The International Baccalaureate program at Metroville High takes an even more academic approach.

Most Cottonwood parents and students seem satisfied with the amount of liberty, or the range of choices, the district allows. Cottonwood's policy of limited open enrollment has allowed students and parents who feel drawn to a special kind of program to switch schools when

that seems to best serve their needs. However, such compromises do not address the social justice concerns related to the concept of equality. In the Cottonwood School District politically sensitive decisions about school-based social programs aimed at equalizing the educational opportunities of students who reside in the district's poorer and more affluent neighborhoods remain highly controversial. For example, heated public meetings recently took place, where loud parent protests were registered over the district's decision to renovate aging schools in low SES areas while schools in the outer suburbs remain overcrowded.

Clearly the ideal of fraternity or community at the core of site-based shared decision making has not been able to transform the ingrained habits and attitudes of adults within the Cottonwood School District. Indeed, I chose to center my discussion on the motto from the French Revolution in part because doing so hints at the size of the transformation that would have to take place for a spirit of fraternity to reign throughout a school district as diverse as Cottonwood. What is noticeable is that some controversial issues have been settled more amicably than might otherwise have happened and most teachers feel they have more of a voice.

My research indicates that, using Sarason's terminology, shared decision making (as practiced in the Cottonwood School District) proved to be a valuable tool for addressing problems which lay within the school district's administrative control. But the shared decision making process did not alter the Cottonwood district's continued vulnerability to important regularities embedded within its social context. These findings suggest that the shared decision making process is not *the* answer to the present school crisis. It can offer no more than a partial solution to problems facing the Cottonwood School Districts--or similar districts elsewhere.

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